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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 1 July to 31 December 2012

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the past six months, pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended in subsequent resolutions, most recently resolution 2052 (2012).

II. Situation in the area and activities of the Force

2. During the period under review, despite isolated violations, the ceasefire in the Israel-Syrian Arab Republic sector generally was maintained. However, the Syrian Arab Armed Forces expanded their deployment and carried out military activities, including security operations, in the UNDOF area of operations, ostensibly to contain domestic unrest and the activities of armed elements. The continued presence of those forces and unauthorized military equipment inside the area of separation are a grave violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. On at least three occasions, Syrian armed forces fire impacted across the Alpha (ceasefire) line on the Israeli-occupied Golan. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) retaliated with fire on three occasions. Firing by both forces across the ceasefire line is also in serious violation of the Agreement.

3. During a firefight between Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition on 25 September, UNDOF observed four mortar rounds from a Syrian position detonate across the ceasefire line on the Israeli-occupied Golan. On 8 November, IDF informed UNDOF that three Syrian mortar or artillery shells landed in and around the village of Alonei Habashan, located on the Alpha side. Upon visiting the spot on the Alpha side, IDF showed UNDOF an unexploded kinetic tank grenade inside the village and two fresh craters where two more shells had exploded in the vicinity. On 11 November, IDF informed UNDOF that small arms fire and one mortar shell had impacted west of the ceasefire line. UNDOF inspected the site and found a fresh crater with clearly identifiable fragments of a Syrian artillery shell. IDF later informed UNDOF that they had fired one missile round in retaliation towards Bir Ajam inside the area of separation. On 12 November, UNDOF observed a mortar round impact approximately 70 m from an IDF observation post; however,

this was east of the ceasefire line. Approximately one hour later, UNDOF observed two IDF tank rounds fired across the ceasefire line. UNDOF did not observe any casualties or damage from the IDF fire. Most recently, on 18 November, Syrian authorities reported that two Syrian soldiers were killed and two others injured as a result of IDF fire across the ceasefire line. According to IDF sources, Israeli troops targeted a Syrian armed forces position near Bir Ajam in the area of separation with anti-tank missiles after an IDF patrol vehicle had sustained damage as a result of Syrian fire. The Syrian armed forces denied that they had fired on the IDF patrol, accusing armed elements of having done so to prompt IDF retaliatory fire. UNDOF confirmed that an IDF patrol vehicle had sustained six bullet impacts, but was not able to identify the perpetrator of the firing on the IDF patrol. UNDOF confirmed that IDF had fired missiles across the ceasefire line in the direction of Bir Ajam. UNDOF was not able to confirm any casualties in the area where the IDF fire landed owing to the security situation.

4. Throughout the reporting period, there were numerous clashes between Syrian security forces and armed members of the opposition in several villages in the area of limitation, particularly the southern and central parts. The area of separation also saw sporadic, often intense, firefights between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition, largely in the central areas of Jabbata, Trunje, Al Horaye and Ufaniyah. The most serious incidents in these areas occurred from 18 to 23 July and on 25 and 26 September, when approximately 1,760 armed Syrian security forces personnel, including soldiers of the Syrian Arab armed forces, entered the area of separation. From the end of October into November, the focus of military activities between Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition expanded to include the villages of Jasim, Baraika and Bir Ajam, and the forest to the west up to the ceasefire line. On 31 October, Syrian armed forces launched a massive offensive, reportedly to neutralize up to 400 armed members of the opposition who had massed in that part of the area of separation. On 3 November, they launched a renewed ground offensive against armed members of the opposition, employing at least four main battle tanks, mortar fire and two armoured personnel carriers painted white with black lettering, in the vicinity of Baraika and Bir Ajam inside the area of separation.

5. In using its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and to see that it is scrupulously observed, as prescribed by the Disengagement Agreement, UNDOF observed and reported instances of transborder movements between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic of unidentified armed individuals in the northern part of the area of separation. On 27 September, a group of 10 persons coming from the direction of Arneh Valley inside the area of separation proceeded north on foot across the border into Lebanon in the Mount Hermon area and handed over weapons to a group of 13 masked persons in black attire. The latter group proceeded south back into the area of separation, where UNDOF observed them change into civilian clothes and apparently stash the weapons, subsequently moving east out of the area of separation.

6. On 29 September, UNDOF saw nine Syrian security forces personnel killed by 13 armed members of the opposition during an ambush inside the area of separation, in the vicinity of United Nations position Hermon South in the Mount Hermon area.

7. Hundreds of local civilians, mostly women, children and elderly persons, have been affected by the ongoing military activities in the area of separation. On 19 July alone, approximately 800 to 900 local civilians left Jabbata with their personal belongings for villages in the southern parts of the area of separation following a

major operation involving 446 Syrian security forces, including soldiers, armed with assault rifles and machine guns. During subsequent clashes between soldiers of the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition in Jabbata on 25 September, approximately 250 civilians, the majority women and their children, pitched tents near the ceasefire line in an effort to seek shelter from the firing.

8. On several occasions, wounded persons, including Syrian Arab armed forces personnel and members of the armed opposition, have sought medical assistance from UNDOF at United Nations positions. UNDOF has provided immediate first aid and emergency medical treatment on a humanitarian basis, when feasible. UNDOF helped the Syrian Arab Red Crescent on several occasions to treat wounded members of the armed opposition and remove dead bodies after informing the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate, the main interlocutor of UNDOF on the Bravo side, and the Liaison Officer on the Israeli-occupied Golan, and liaising with the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC). In addition, UNDOF has been asked to provide a number of other humanitarian services, ranging from the provision of food and water to facilitating the safe passage of civilians from villages under fire. On 5 November, 40 to 50 civilians came to United Nations position 69 and asked UNDOF to facilitate the safe passage of nearly 1,000 civilians from the village of Baraika. Attempts by UNDOF/United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) military observers to enter the village were halted after the windshield of the lead vehicle was hit by sniper fire. On 8 November, following clashes in Bir Ajam, UNDOF attempted, on a strictly humanitarian basis, to facilitate the movement of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to provide safe passage to civilians out of the village. The convoy came across a firefight between Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition, at which point it turned around. Soon thereafter, the convoy was stopped by Syrian armed forces soldiers who forced Syrian Arab Red Crescent personnel from their vehicles. UNDOF soldiers observed Syrian soldiers pointing their guns at the Red Crescent personnel lying on the ground. After approximately five minutes, the convoy was allowed to proceed.

9. Syrian Arab armed forces fire in the UNDOF area of operations has at times impacted in close proximity to United Nations personnel and facilities. Between 15 and 17 October, UNDOF observed several detonations and gunfire within a 3-km radius of its headquarters in Camp Faouar. On occasion, shots have been fired at UNTSO military observers carrying out activities in clearly marked United Nations vehicles in the area of limitation. The UNTSO military observers are operationally integrated in UNDOF as Observer Group Golan and are under the operational control of the UNDOF Force Commander. There have also been instances when Syrian armed forces personnel pointed their guns in a threatening manner at UNDOF personnel, including on 25 September when four Syrian soldiers at a checkpoint pointed their rifles at the vehicle of the UNDOF Force Commander. Most recently, on 21 November, two military observers of Observer Group Golan were detained and threatened at gunpoint by Syrian soldiers during a planned inspection of a Syrian position in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. Of particular concern was the use by Syrian armed forces, early in November, of two white armoured personnel carriers, which could have been mistaken for United Nations vehicles, in the vicinity of Bir Ajam inside the area of separation (see para. 4). After a strong protest from UNDOF and from the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations during a meeting with the Minister of Defence of the Syrian Arab Republic, two tanks and the white armoured personnel carriers

were withdrawn from the area of separation. Tank and mortar rounds impacted within 50 m of United Nations positions 68 and 69. Facilities of both positions were hit by small arms fire.

10. Since Syrian security operations started inside the area of separation, checkpoints inside the area of separation, manned by Syrian security forces and Syrian armed forces personnel, have been established on a permanent basis. Soldiers of the Syrian armed forces also maintained checkpoints at the eastern entrances to the area of separation, to control and restrict traffic. In recent weeks, firing, from inside and outside the area of separation, by artillery, mortars, main battle tanks, machine guns and anti-aircraft guns towards Jabata, Trunje, Ufaniyah, Al Horaye, Bir Ajam, Braika and/or Jasim has been occurring on a daily basis. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate, as well as armed members of the opposition, have advised UNDOF several times that all United Nations personnel should avoid the areas mentioned for security reasons.

11. The UNDOF Force Commander has done his utmost to stress to Syrian authorities that the military operations of the Syrian Arab armed forces in the area of separation are a breach of the Disengagement Agreement. On each occasion, UNDOF has protested at the entry of Syrian soldiers and the shooting into and inside the area of separation. When Syrian armed forces have nevertheless proceeded with the operations, the UNDOF Force Commander continued to remind the Syrian authorities of their obligation to halt those activities in the area of separation, cease firing from the area of limitation and abide by the terms of the Disengagement Agreement. The UNDOF Force Commander emphasized to Syrian authorities that firing across the ceasefire line is a violation of the Disengagement Agreement.

12. The UNDOF Force Commander has also maintained close liaison with IDF on security developments in the area of separation and urged maximum restraint, also emphasizing that firing across the ceasefire line is a violation of the Disengagement Agreement. During the Syrian security operations, IDF reinforced its troops along the technical fence as a precautionary measure. UNDOF maintained close liaison with IDF and the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate throughout.

13. In other incidents, on 29 August, one small civilian aircraft breached the ceasefire line from the Alpha side and momentarily flew over the town of Quneitra. On 3 October, 13 IDF soldiers crossed the ceasefire line after observing several armed civilians in the area of separation. UNDOF protested about both incidents to IDF as violations of the Disengagement Agreement.

14. Within this increasingly challenging operational environment, UNDOF supervised the area of separation by manning fixed positions and patrols to ensure that military forces of either party were excluded from it. UNDOF also carried out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the areas of limitation. Liaison Officers from the Alpha side accompanied inspection teams of Observer Group Golan. On the Bravo side, Syrian authorities ceased the practice of providing Liaison Officers to accompany Observer Group inspection teams following the abduction on 30 July of a Syrian Liaison Officer accompanying the military observers by unknown armed persons in the area of limitation. As in the past, both sides denied inspection teams access to some of their positions and imposed restrictions on the Force's freedom of movement. Beyond such routine and temporary restrictions, Observer Group Golan continued to encounter restrictions of movement in the southern and central parts of the area of limitation on the Bravo

side, where both Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition have interfered with the conduct of Observer Group patrols. Syrian authorities denied access, largely in the vicinities of As Sharajah, Harra, Jaseem, Kanakir, Namir, Nawa and Tasil, ostensibly for reasons of safety and security of the military observers.

15. UNDOF adopted a number of necessary security measures to ensure the safety and security of its personnel. Mitigation measures have included, inter alia, limiting movements and using alternative routes, limiting mobile operations when warranted, imposing a two-person-per-car movement code for vehicles and using armoured vehicles in the sensitive areas. UNDOF also has enhanced its patrolling along the ceasefire line with the Force Headquarters Company. An UNDOF platoon at Camp Ziouani has been put on standby, ready to reinforce United Nations position 60 on the Bravo side, where an alternative battalion command post has been established on a permanent basis. Additionally, a third platoon for the Force Headquarters Company was created by pooling manpower with effect from 19 October.

16. UNDOF continued to adapt its operational posture to the ongoing IDF training activities and new military construction in the area of limitation on the Alpha side and Syrian civilian development growth in proximity to the ceasefire line in the area of separation. New defensive positions were constructed in the areas of limitation on the Alpha and Bravo sides. IDF enhanced the technical fence and established physical obstacles along the technical fence to prevent crossings from the area of separation. Both sides maintained existing defensive positions in the respective areas of limitation. Israeli national Customs officials continued to operate periodically at the IDF post at the UNDOF crossing gate between the Israeli-occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

17. The Force continued to assist ICRC with the passage of civilians through the area of separation. During the past six months, UNDOF assisted in the crossing of 137 students and one bride, and seven humanitarian crossings. UNDOF, together with ICRC, facilitated the release of four Syrian civilians who were apprehended and detained by IDF on the Alpha side after allegedly crossing the ceasefire line. UNDOF provided medical treatment to 245 civilians, in addition to the immediate first aid and emergency medical treatment provided on a strictly humanitarian basis (see para. 8).

18. In the area of operations, especially in the vicinity of the ceasefire line in the area of separation, mines continued to pose a threat to UNDOF personnel and local inhabitants. Owing to the long-term presence of the mines and the deterioration of their detonation systems, the threat has increased. With improved mine clearing and detection capacity, UNDOF continued to carry out operational mine clearance.

19. As mentioned above, the UNDOF Force Commander and his staff maintained close contact with the military authorities of Israel and of the Syrian Arab Republic.

20. In view of the population growth and multiple construction developments in the area of separation and area of limitation, the expansion of agricultural and cattle grazing areas, and an overall increase in civilian activities, UNDOF continued its efforts as a matter of course to liaise with local authorities and civilians to explain the mission's mandate and activities. This was also important in the light of the security situation in the UNDOF area of operations, and in an effort to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground. However, the UNDOF civil affairs capacity, composed of a Civil Affairs Officer and Observer Group Golan,

was restricted owing to a lack of cooperation from Syrian authorities in facilitating contact with the local authorities and the civilian population on the Bravo side.

21. As at 20 November, UNDOF comprised 1,035 troops from Austria (377), the Philippines (340), India (192), Croatia (95) and Japan (31). A total of 15 personnel are employed by Japan as a national support element. Three military personnel from Canada left UNDOF on 6 September 2012 at the instruction of their Government. In addition, 77 military observers from UNTSO assisted the Force in carrying out its tasks.

22. In view of the security situation, UNDOF enhanced efforts to ensure the necessary strategic reserve and the Force's self-sustainment capability. UNDOF continued to implement the rehabilitation programme to maintain and upgrade its equipment and infrastructure in an effort to maintain its operational and security capacity. New long-range observation equipment, night vision devices and armoured vehicles were procured and deployed with a view to enhancing force protection, and specialized training was provided where necessary. In addition, new offices have been constructed at UNDOF headquarters and the rehabilitation programme is ongoing at the UNDOF logistics base, Camp Ziouani.

23. During the reporting period, UNDOF remained up to date with its contingency planning for various scenarios relating to its operational environment. UNDOF continued to make adequate preparations for the short and medium terms, consistent with United Nations Headquarters policies pertaining to the safety and security of United Nations personnel and assets. The mission continually reviewed its military security and related contingency planning to include possible scenarios related to increased threats due to the domestic instability in the Syrian Arab Republic. Owing to the security situation, UNDOF international staff and members of Observer Group Golan were relocated from Damascus to Camp Faouar and the Alpha side. Should the situation deteriorate and result in conditions under which it is no longer feasible for UNDOF to use the airport in Damascus, my representatives have informed Syrian authorities that it would be necessary for UNDOF to use alternative ports of entry and departure for the mission's personnel, including staff officers and contingent members.

III. Financial aspects

24. By its resolution 66/276, the General Assembly appropriated the amount of $46 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013. Should the Security Council approve my recommendation, set out in paragraph 33 below, with respect to the extension of the mandate of UNDOF, the cost for the maintenance of the Force during the extension period will therefore be limited to resources approved by the General Assembly.

25. As at 16 November 2012, unpaid assessed contributions to the UNDOF Special Account amounted to $15.9 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at the same date amounted to $1,692.2 million.

26. As at 16 November 2012, amounts owed to contributors for troop costs totalled $1.1 million. Reimbursements for troop costs and for equipment and self-sustainment have been made for the periods up to 30 September 2012 and 30 June 2012, respectively, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

IV. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

27. The Security Council, when deciding in its resolution 2052 (2012) to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, until 31 December 2012, also called upon the parties concerned to implement immediately its resolution 338 (1973), and requested me to submit, at the end of the period, a report on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement that resolution. The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, in particular the efforts undertaken at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), was dealt with in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/67/342), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 66/18, entitled "Jerusalem", and 66/19, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

28. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties, and the Syrian crisis currently further complicates efforts towards Israeli-Syrian peace. I look forward to a peaceful resolution of the crisis and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions.

V. Observations

29. I am deeply concerned about the evolution of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, its impact on the Syrian population and its potential implications for the entire region. It is affecting the UNDOF area of operations significantly. The presence of Syrian Arab armed forces and unauthorized military equipment in the area of separation is a grave violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement between Israeli and Syrian forces. The military operations carried out by the Syrian Arab armed forces have affected adversely the efforts of UNDOF to effectively carry out the mandated tasks. I call on Syrian authorities to cease these activities in the UNDOF area of operations.

30. Recent incidents across the ceasefire line have shown the potential for escalation of tensions between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic, and jeopardize the ceasefire between the two countries and the stability of the region. Indeed, all military activities in the area of separation pose a risk to the long-held ceasefire and to the local civilian population, as well as United Nations personnel on the ground. I am concerned that the presence of armed members of the opposition and the ongoing military activities of the Syrian security forces have the potential to ignite a larger conflict between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic, with grave consequences. There should be no military activity of any kind in the area of separation.

31. The prevailing situation in the Syrian Arab Republic does not absolve the Government of that country of its responsibilities under international law, including the protection of civilian persons. The primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel in the area of separation and the area of limitation on the Bravo side also rests with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is imperative that respect for the privileges and immunities of UNDOF and its freedom of movement is ensured.

32. The commitment to the Disengagement Agreement must be upheld by both parties. I call on the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel to fulfil their obligations under the Disengagement Agreement and halt firing of any kind across the ceasefire line. I

trust that both sides will take all necessary measures to protect civilians and to ensure respect for the safety and security of UNDOF as well as its freedom of movement throughout its area of operations.

33. Under the prevailing circumstances, I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area to be essential. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for a further period of six months, until 30 June 2013. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel also has expressed its agreement.

34. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to Major General Iqbal Singh Singha and the military and civilian personnel serving with UNDOF and UNTSO. They have performed with efficiency and commitment the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council. I also would like to express my appreciation to Major General Natalio Ecarma for his exemplary leadership and dedicated service in UNDOF for over two years. I have full confidence that UNDOF will continue to carry out its mission effectively under the leadership of General Singha. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Governments contributing troops to UNDOF and to those which provide the UNTSO military observers assigned to the Force.